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ASSESSING THE ROLE OF MOTIVATIONAL FACTORS IN FACILITATING ARTISTS'  
PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

by

ECE GURLER

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SYNTHESIS\*

MASTER OF ARTS

CRITICAL AND CREATIVE THINKING

UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS BOSTON

May 2021

Advisor: Robert Ricketts

\* The Synthesis can take a variety of forms, from a position paper to curriculum or professional development workshop to an original contribution in the creative arts or writing. The expectation is that students use their Synthesis to show how they have integrated knowledge, tools, experience, and support gained in the program so as to prepare themselves to be constructive, reflective agents of change in work, education, social movements, science, creative arts, or other endeavors.

## ABSTRACT

Various factors exert influence on an artist's impetus. If artists can learn about different ways to use these both external and internal factors to facilitate their personal and professional development, their creative process and productivity will be affected positively. According to the research, individuals display three types of orientation during the exploration and development process -and so creative process: The desire to be effective (White, 1959), autonomous (DeCharms, 1968), and related to significant others (Deci & Ryan, 1991). Effective-oriented personalities tend to be motivated by extrinsic rewards or punishment, whereas autonomously oriented people are more intrinsically motivated. However, understanding the artistic motives is more complicated than that: while some artists have a favorable view of a factor, e.g., criticism, another artist could perceive the same environmental aspect as unfavorable and be impacted by it negatively. By considering these orientational and perceptual differences, this paper aims to understand the dynamics of the elements surrounding artists such as reward and evaluation, creative blocks, discrimination, economic factors and assess their influence on artist's improvement. In the end, actionable takeaways and toolkits for artists, especially for art teachers and students, will be proposed.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

List of Figures.....	5
Introduction .....	6
My Background.....	7
Motivation .....	8
Extrinsic and Intrinsic Motivation .....	9
The Effect of Perception and Interpretation .....	14
Motivation and Art.....	15
Positive & Negative Effects on Artist's Intrinsic & Extrinsic Motivation .....	16
Reward and evaluation. ....	17
Passion. ....	19
Personal Factors. ....	21
Creative Blocks .....	22
Environment as a Factor. ....	25
Discussion: Impact on Artist Impetus.....	37
External Triggers and Their Impact on Internal Motives.....	38
Reward and Evaluation.....	38
Passion. ....	41

## ASSESSING THE ROLE OF MOTIVATIONAL FACTORS IN ARTISTS' DEVELOPMENT

Personal Factors. ....	42
Creative Blocks .....	43
Exposure to Art. ....	48
Economic Factors. ....	49
Discrimination.....	51
Internet.....	55
Conclusion .....	55
Moving Forward .....	61
REFERENCES .....	63
Appendices .....	70
APPENDIX A: SOCIAL MEDIA RECOGNITION COMPARISON .....	70
APPENDIX B: DARK ART EXAMPLES FROM MY STUDENTS.....	72
APPENDIX C: ART SCHOOL FACTS .....	73

## List of Figures

Figure 1- Two motivation types: Extrinsic and Intrinsic Motivation. ....	10
Figure 2-The bar graphs showing the results of the survey I gave to my students.....	12
Figure 3- The Emancipation sculpture depicting Abraham Lincoln holding a copy of his Emancipation Proclamation freeing a subjugated male African American slave. ....	33
Figure 4-The Ladder of Inference: A thinking process that we go through, from data to action, most of the time without realizing it (Senge, 1994, p. 245, Figure 3). ....	40
Figure 5- Positive and Negative Perception of the same external factor input. ....	44
Figure 6 - Yayoi Kusama turned her hallucinations into her art. Now, these dots are her trademark. ....	47
Figure 7- Coffee Art Portrait by Andrew Turtsevych.....	51
Figure 8- The French-Cree, Shoshone, Salish, New Mexican artist Jaune Quick-to-See Smith makes art that repositions Native American culture within contemporary American life.....	53
Figure 9- Past Time by Marshall Kerry James .....	54
Figure 10- The Path of motivation and Motivational Tools for the Artists .....	57
Figure 11- The Motivation Cycle for the artist showing the main stages and potential external factors affecting each step. ....	58

## **Introduction**

Art provides a getaway from the mundane everyday life: Those for whom art offers an escape can project an image of the world we want to be in and get lost in art, even just for a couple of minutes, if not for hours. Creating art can help people with anxiety, depression, and even cancer, besides improving memory, reasoning, and resilience (Harvard Health Publishing, 2017). Nevertheless, this beautiful art-making process might sometimes become challenging for artists who regularly spend serious amounts of effort and time on their work.

Being an artist is a lonely job as the work involves just the creator and the creative product. I know this firsthand, as I am an artist myself and teach techniques to aspiring adult learners – eighteen years and above - with little or no experience in the art field. As of now, I have seven students that I give private lessons and my online workshop has about a hundred participants in total. I have noted both in my students and myself that lack of guidance, help, or direction from a third party might make the art creation process even more difficult to learn. I have been observing my students' motivational ups and downs and how their art gets impacted by these. Having been challenged by very similar emotions in the past, I wanted to take action and conduct this research. My assertion is that motivation is as essential to aspiring artists' lives as guidance and skill acquisition.

A detailed study about factors that affect motivation and their negative and positive impacts on creative productivity may help inexperienced artists tremendously. Through awareness of motivational factors, novices can become equipped to build personal strategies to tackle the adverse effects on their creative drive and be more open to the positive effects as they come. In my observation, the more motivation aspiring artists possess, the more driven they feel.

In hypothesis, this type of emotional boost will eventually contribute to cultivating a more constraint-free, fearless orientation from which to create art.

### **My Background**

When I first started my art career in 2018, it was easy to get discouraged: I was constantly comparing the work of great artists with mine, which made me feel like I was never going to reach their mastery level. My brushstrokes were hesitant, my colors were too traditional, and my lines were so predictable. The work of master artists was unique, confident, and they had great control over their medium. I wanted to be like them so badly, yet that expertise level had seemed beyond reach. However, as I exposed my creations on social media by posting and promoting my artwork, I began to receive positive comments. Then I realized that I might have been too critical of myself. When one of the artists I admired sent me a message on social media congratulating me, finding my work really professional, and asking which techniques I used, I realized how far I had come. My self-confidence was restored at that very exact moment. Her acknowledgment motivated me to practice more and improve my art. Of course, the positive effect of receiving praise from a respected practitioner started to reflect on the quality of my work, as well: I was willing to take more risks in terms of color choices and the difficulty level of the painting. The more risks I took, the more I explored and improved. It felt like doing yoga: It seems as if a particular pose is unattainable and there is no way of doing it. Nevertheless, the unthinkable might be accomplished by trying little by little every day: A challenging pose, such as the headstand, could be performed easily. Thus, improvement occurs through taking risks and pushing limits incrementally. By leveraging an awareness of the various motivational factors that may come into play when creating art, art students' willingness to take risks and push their limits/boundaries may be increased progressively.



## Motivation

Why do we get up in the morning and do what we do? Where does this motivation come from? Furthermore, what is motivation in the first place? This remarkable phenomenon is described by Vallerand & Thill (1993) as follows: "Motivation is the hypothetical construct used to describe internal and external forces that produce the initiation, direction, intensity, and persistence of behavior" (p.18; translated from French). The source of this "force" has been significantly discussed in the psychology literature, and the debate continues.

Most studies about motivation focus on the difference between the two types: intrinsic and extrinsic motivation and how rewards or punishment affect these two motives. *Intrinsic motivation* means an inner drive to do things just for itself, to get pure joy and satisfaction out of performing the activity, not necessarily contingent on any reward or gain (Deci, 1975). This internal force is the kind of drive that wakes you up at night and tells you to paint because you just had a great idea. *Extrinsic motivation* refers to a drive to perform to receive rewards or avoid punishment in the end (Deci & Ryan, 1985b). This kind of motive is the one that makes you go to bed late because your commission work is due tomorrow. Therefore, both internal and external factors affect human motivation.

In the past three years, I have had so many students who were just starting out and needed direction and moral support. The lack of confidence, combined with fear of failure was resulting in statements such as "I am not good enough," "I will never improve," "I will never draw like you," or "I am not talented."

*The discounting principle* is a term used to describe a behavior pattern that occurs when there is both a possible intrinsic and extrinsic explanation for the same action. The principle

states that individuals tend to focus on the external cause and totally dismiss the internal cause (Kelley, 1973). Although I see the discounting principle in play in some of the cases with my students, when they say, "I cannot draw well because I do not have high-quality supplies," I do not think they are completely ignoring the internal causes. A statement such as "I will never draw like you" is actually an inner reflection in which their fear or lack of self-belief is talking. This type of worry usually comes from the lack of training in painting and drawing techniques, although the aspiring artists think the problem is them, not the other outside factors.

In comparison to studies by Kelley (1973) which revealed the discounting principle, my experience has been the other way around: Most of my novice students blamed themselves, thinking that they were not born with a talent. If the artists know why they feel discouraged might be due to so many varied reasons other than fear of failure, it might help them reflect differently on potential causes. Through awareness of motivational factors, aspiring artists can build strategies to defend themselves against adverse effects and turn positive characteristics to their advantage.

### **Extrinsic and Intrinsic Motivation**

As I mentioned before, both internal and external factors affect our incentives (Figure 1). Understanding the differences between these components is vital for this research since we look for ways to explore both negative and positive motivational impacts on artists' drive.

Under **extrinsic**, we have four categories (Vallerand, 2012):

1. *External regulation*, in which we act in order to be rewarded or avoid punishment.
2. *Introjected regulation*, in which we act to avoid guilt or pressure.

3. *Identified regulation*, in which we act out of will and choice upon an external trigger. For instance, when someone help an old lady who is trying to cross the street, that is due to identified regulation.

4. *Integrated regulation*, in which we act out of choice but this time with coherence about other constituents of self. For example, activist Wangari Maathai, the founder of “The Greenbelt Movement” in Kenya felt this strong urge to respond the biggest issue in her country. Since she grew up farming, she felt dedicated to preventing further environmental destruction and restore what was destroyed.

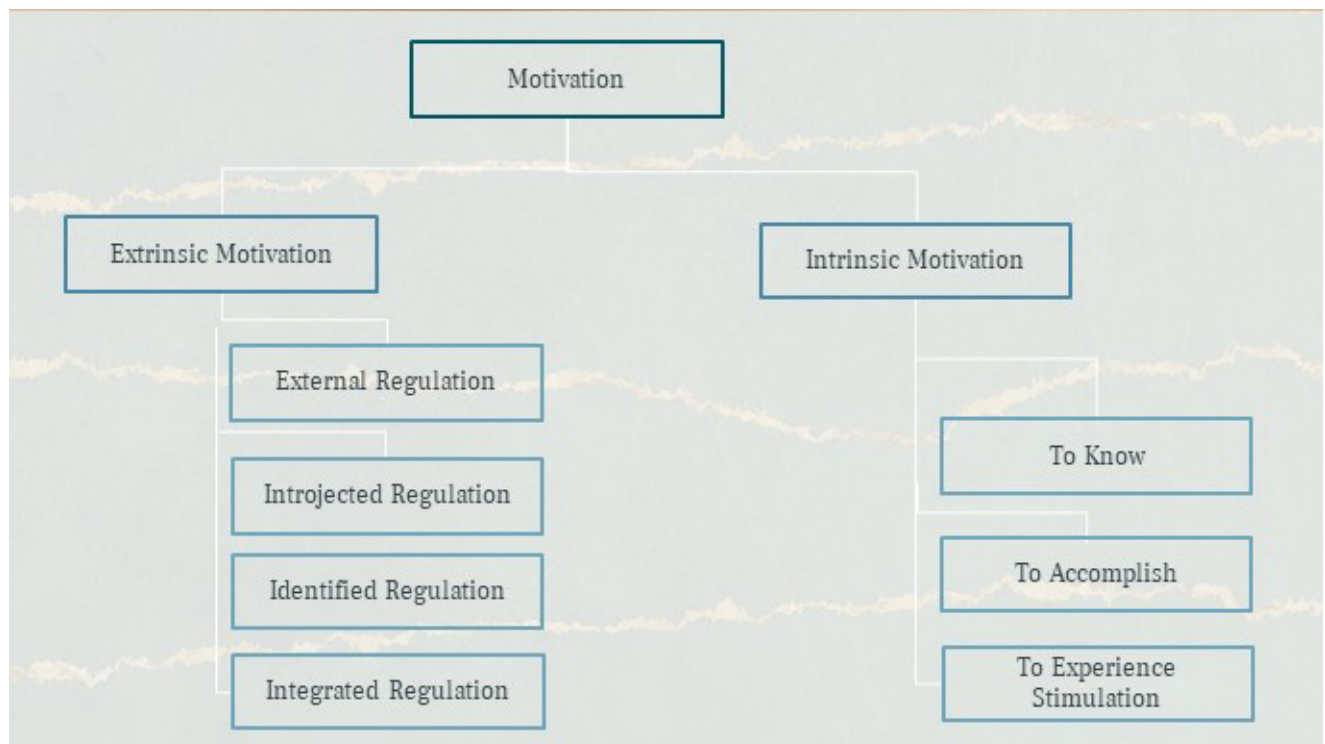


Figure 1- Two motivation types: Extrinsic and Intrinsic Motivation.

In addition to all these, when the motivation is absent, it is called *amotivation* (Deci & Ryan, 1985b). Among the extrinsic motivation types, from external to integrated regulation, self-determination increases, meaning that the person tends to control and complete the task more.

This self-determination makes the motive more resilient and long-lasting, even crossing the threshold to intrinsic motivation sometimes. This only makes sense since we tend to be more engaged and perform with higher concentration when we start our work with an inner determination rather than someone forcing us to do it. In their study, Ryan and Deci (2000) claimed that "The more students were externally regulated the less they showed interest, value, and effort toward achievement and the more they tended to disown responsibility for negative outcomes, blaming others such as the teacher" (p. 73). As a personal choice, I do not do commissioned work for the very same reason as the typical nature of commissioned work is to meet customer expectations. I want to paint and draw for myself, to express myself in the way that I wish to: this is how I feel productive and fulfilled. Besides, even though the client gave the artist a complete freedom, the simple factor of commitment to produce a work in the future would fall under something "we have to do". According to the recent survey results I did on my social media (Figure 2), the artists polled share the same opinion: "Commissions limit our creativity as it is something we have to do rather than we are inspired to do" (Gurler, 2021). In this case, the external reward, the commission work diminished my students' inner motivation.

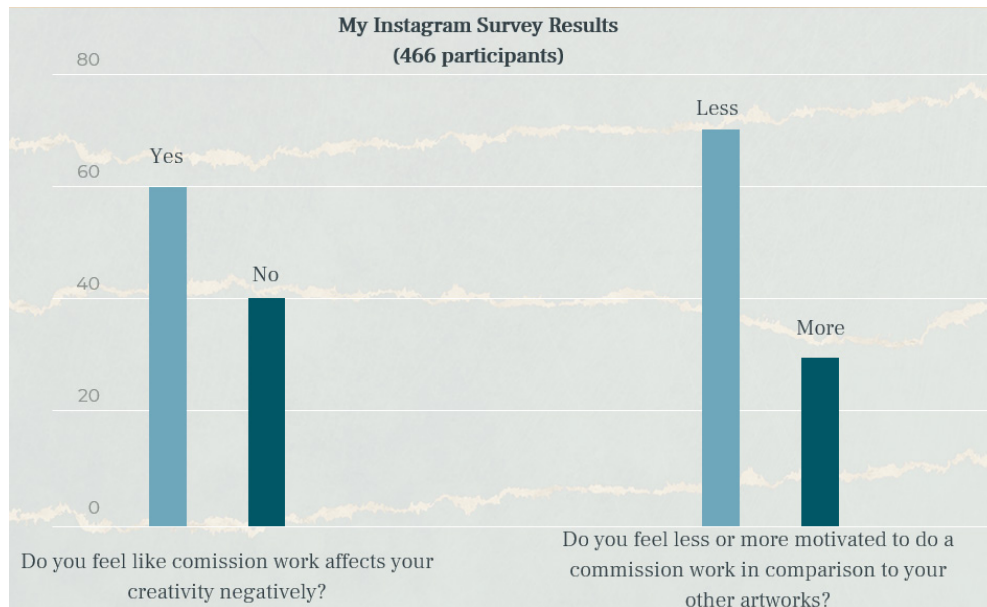


Figure 2-The bar graphs showing the results of the survey I gave to my students

Under the heading **intrinsic**, we have three categories (Vallerand, 2012):

1. *Intrinsic motivation to know*, in which one engages in activities purely for its pleasure. They enjoy the learning and exploration process itself.
2. *Intrinsic motivation to accomplish*, in which one engages in activities purely for the satisfaction they get from achieving something or surpassing themselves.
3. *Intrinsic motivation to experience stimulation*, in which one engages in activities purely for the stimulating sensations associated with it.

I can easily see that all these intrinsic motivation types coexist in my student groups. They might have one of these types more dominant than others. However, I can confidently say that all these three make up the foundation layer of artist motivation in my community. I was surprised not to see a category such as "*Intrinsic motivation to express oneself*." Because one of the most prominent purposes of the artists that I worked with so far was "individual expression,"

in which they can define themselves through art. Having thought that, my research took me further, and I came across Kovac's (2016) study: *The Self-expression Motivational System*, from the book *Basic Motivation and Human Behaviour*. His research conforms with my experience: self-expression is indeed worthy of consideration as a basic motivational concept. Besides, Kemler's (2014) research with several artists found that self-examination and self-understanding play a massive role in their desire to perform. I contend that expressing their thoughts about the world, society, or even themselves and finding their own identity in their art need to be counted as one of the artist's primary inner drives.

Researchers claimed intrinsic and extrinsic motivation had an additive relationship, meaning there is an interplay between them (Porter & Lawler, 1968). Thus, they argue the co-presence of both yields the highest level of motivation. However, a study with human subjects implied that encouraging individuals to perform an exciting activity by offering them a monetary reward eventually caused a decrease in levels of subsequent intrinsic motivation in the process (Deci, 1971). After Deci's study, this relationship between the two types of inspiration has been examined in more detail by many authors. They mainly concentrated on the immediate effects of several contextual variables such as rewards, punishments, constraints, deadlines, and feedback (Vallerand, 2012). These studies showed that the explanation of the interplay between the intrinsic and extrinsic types was not black and white. For instance, under certain specific conditions, a reward can sometimes lead to enhanced extrinsic motivation levels without causing any negative impact on intrinsic motivation or performance (Hennessey, 2010). According to the survey I did among my students (Figure 2), the majority who felt that commissioned work increased their inner drive to do their art were young artists. Because they were new in their

artistic career, they saw commissioned work as a means by which to test and improve their skills and earn recognition. There was no negative motivational impact on these novices.

### **The Effect of Perception and Interpretation**

The significance of perception in motivation was something I noticed among my students. For instance, even though I gave the same feedback to two different artists on a particular occasion, they perceived my recommendations very differently. While one was inspired by my advice and improved their skills quickly, the other one was offended by my feedback, which prevented them from working with the same level of inner motivation onwards. This baffling situation is explained in Hennessey (2010) perfectly as the author makes a connection with the human perception, "Individual's interpretation of the reward or evaluation and his or her role in the reward/evaluation process in large part determine whether task motivation will be undermined, enhanced or remain unchanged" (p. 70). Here, task motivation can be described as the combination of motivational variables that form people's approach to a given task (Yeh, 2017). I interpreted Hennessey's words like this: Probably before giving my feedback, I had not yet built an adequate degree of reciprocal trust and respect with my offended student. Our lack of connection affected her perception and how she interpreted what I said. There is another possibility that she was having a bad day, and other external factors had made her feel agitated already. This particular event leaves me, the teacher, with the responsibility of exploring this student's issue later to figure out the root cause of the case and what we can do about that.

## Motivation and Art

The more motivated my students are at the beginning of their creative process, the more beautiful their art turns out to be. Suppose there is something wrong in their lives. In that case, they do not have to tell me because I can see it in their work: For instance, when a detail-loving student skips a few essential details that day, or the one who always paints bright colors decides to go darker, or another one is working at a plodding pace that day, I immediately ask them what is wrong. Most of the time, my senses are correct. It is easier for me to understand when they are not motivated. However, I still try to find out where their aspirations come from. Why are they painting? What is driving them to do art in the first place?

Earlier studies claim different explanations for creative motivation: Kohut (1966) says the drive comes from a positive transformation of narcissism. Freud (1910) believed that the artist's motivation comes from releasing egoistic daydreams through artistic creations. Kohut and Freud's definitions can be related to the self-expression drive I described earlier as a common trait I see among my students. Hebb (1955) and Berlyne (1960) argue that creative motivation comes from the task's novelty. The task novelty can be associated with the intrinsic motivation *to know*. White (1959) and Harter (1978) suggest that competence and mastery are the keys to creative drives, which immediately makes me think of *intrinsic motivation to accomplish*. I observe all the above inner drives among my students. Some of my students have multiple of them in co-existence. However, one of the intrinsic motives is more prominent or surfaces more often than the others.

Understanding the source of this ambition was essential for me, but not enough. Initiation of this driving force is one thing but keeping it persistent is the main challenge as many factors seem to influence it.



### **Positive & Negative Effects on Artist's Intrinsic & Extrinsic Motivation**

We may refer to the art-making process as an "exploration and development" process. According to the organismic approach, during a process like this, the individuals experience three orientations: the desire to be effective (White, 1959), autonomous (DeCharms, 1968), and related to significant others (Deci & Ryan, 1991). These tendencies form the basis of Self-Determination Theory which focuses on our inner psychological needs and how much success we have in pursuing and achieving our valued goals (Deci & Ryan, 1985a, 1985b, 1996, 2000, 2008).

According to the same study, depending on our preference of how much we exhibit each of the three orientations, our motivational tendency, and the degree to which we get impacted by the environment shape accordingly. For instance, if my students care more about being autonomous, intrinsic motivational factors will positively impact them. Whereas if they care more about being functional, this will depend on the evaluation factor, bringing in the extrinsic constraint variable.

Suppose one cares most about how their artwork will be evaluated in the end more than the innate joy they get from the exploration and creating process. In that case, this means their motivation will tend to be affected by extrinsic elements in the environment. Therefore, the degree to which an individual gets affected by these positive and negative factors may differ. I try to notice these tendencies among my students by talking to them individually. While talking to them about their aspirations, goals, and what inspires them, I can clearly understand their priorities. Knowing their orientations help me determine the best way to approach my students while giving my feedback: Learning the various ways to improve my capacity to evaluate my students' reactions or response to an external stimulus would allow me to build individualized strategies. So that I can facilitate my students' personal and professional development.

When I think about my own experience with my students, whereas the foundation layer of artist motivation in my community is intrinsic, I see that the source of their motivational challenges is primarily external. For instance, the environment, including the people, physical space, and the current economic status, play a significant role. However, how people read and understand these extrinsic elements decides the fate of the artist's motivation. Besides these components, the internally sourced forces also exert influence on artistic drives. Passion is one of them. Additionally, creativity-hindering thoughts and behaviors such as emotional, mental, and perceptual blocks may have an immense effect on their artistic desires.

**Reward and evaluation.** Various forms of rewards seem to impact artist motivation. When I first think about it, creativity should have difficulty thriving in the presence of reward or evaluation. Because if the artist forces themselves to create an idea quickly or efficiently with shortcuts because of a set deadline, they will avoid taking risks and expanding their thinking. Part of the creative process involves leaving the constraints behind and thinking divergently. For instance, for a contest, the artist might play it safe with the colors and the composition and paint something they are already familiar with without trying something new or crazy. Alternatively, the limited freedom might hinder the joy of creativity in the long term. Although the creative process also includes convergent thinking, the first step of idea initiation comes with divergent thinking where the artist feels autonomous the most. If the artist is allowed to do work with more autonomy, the inspiration level they feel could be elevated. There is a difference between these two requests: "Paint my dog using this photo" and "Paint me a cute dog" as the latter leaves more room to explore the inherent potentiality of creativity, making the autonomously oriented artist happy and inspired.

However, when we think about the reward as verbal praise, recognition, or a financial incentive in return for hard work, I experienced positive effects on my students. In literature, there is a heated debate on whether extrinsic motivational factors inhibit intrinsic drives. Most recent studies argue that the relationship between the two is not quite simple. The differences are mostly circumstantial: Under certain circumstances, increased extrinsic motivation creates no negative impact on intrinsic one (Hennessey, 2010). Among the rewards, maybe the most common one is verbal praises. Verbal rewards are claimed to increase innate drive in more straightforward tasks. In contrast, the same encouragement had an opposite effect on the artist's drive during a much more difficult task (Hewett & Conway, 2015). This discrepancy is probably because the praise meant a high expectation of the teacher or the audience. The self-doubt of the artist in meeting this expectation increases with the difficulty or complexity of the task.

In my case where I received verbal praise from a well-known artist on Instagram, the reward did not have any association with a certain task. Therefore, the compliments had a positive impact on me. However, when there is a certain task involved, the situation could have been different. Once, my student was working on Gandhi's portrait when I realized he was making plodding progress. The more I was trying to encourage him, the more stressed he looked. When I asked, he said this portrait meant a lot to him due to his Indian upbringing. According to him, this had to be the best of his works since he felt responsible not only to me but also to his people. He said, "You put so much trust in me. I cannot fail you." Until that moment, I had never thought that my particular interest in a student's work could create an extra burden. Thomas Britt (2005) mentions this phenomenon in his study: "People may become more anxious while engaging in an identity-relevant performance because the outcome of performance has greater implications for the individual's self-concept" (p. 190).

Hennessey (2010) argued that the extrinsic undermining impact of rewards only happens when the prize is task contingent –meaning the reward is given only when the task is completed-during the creative process. Nevertheless, his results are still contradictory: In his study, most volunteers responded poorly to the task contingent reward, whereas others performed much better with the incentive, resulting in more creative artwork. If the researchers had investigated the experience levels of these students, this could have been a more reliable study. In the research example, the latter group might have been inexperienced artists who were eager to earn recognition and respect more than their already-established counterparts – just as I observed with my own group of students.

**Passion.** Passion is a powerful driving factor in creativity, but it comes with its own disadvantages. Vallerand (2012) describes passion as "A strong inclination toward an activity that people like, find important, and in which they invest time and energy on a regular basis." In the previous sections, it has been discussed that there is evidence that if the initial intrinsic motivation is powerful, extrinsic rewards seem to improve the process's quality and output. This strong intrinsic motivation is described as "passion." People start to show a tendency towards their favorite tasks after a certain period of trial and error. Nevertheless, only a few of these activities will resonate with the artist and feel meaningful. Therefore, the artist will feel "passionate" about these select, meaningful tasks, resulting in emotion having a direct effect on the artist's motivation. This type of emotional connection makes me think about what Britt (2005) said in his research: how identity-relevance -intrinsic motivation to express oneself- positively impacted low-moderate difficulty tasks, whereas it had a harmful effect on tasks with higher difficulty levels. Thus, this tells me that having a passion and resonance with the art piece

might not be enough to keep the motivation high; the difficulty level of the tasks involved also might have a significant impact on the outcome.

Again, though, it comes down to the perception of the "difficulty": what was difficult for my Indian student might not be perceived as problematic for my American student since the latter will not feel culturally responsible and emotionally attached to it. So, my Indian student could not keep his intrinsic motivation high despite being passionate about his art piece. The cultural pressure made his art process feel more complicated than it already was.

Passion can be a good thing or a bad thing, depending on the circumstances. This dilemma might be explained in terms of internalization processes. There are two internalization processes: controlled and autonomous (Deci et al., 1994; Sheldon, 2002; Vallerand et al., 1997). Vallerand (2012) suggests that these processes lead to two types of passion: obsessive and harmonious, respectively. In the former, passion takes control, and artists cannot help it. This type of motive can be dangerous as individuals might experience negative feelings such as anxiety and guilt. They could suffer from lack of concentration or sleep and other behavioral consequences due to over-engaging in the activity. In the latter, internalization happens autonomously. Individuals consider the exercise as necessary and feel a connection between the process and their identity and self. Therefore, identity relevance brings a stronger intrinsic, autonomous motivation.

In history, there are many examples of both. Vincent Van Gogh's obsessive drive to paint worsened his mental illness and physical health. He was spending all his money on art supplies instead of food. During his long painting sessions, he was feeding himself only coffee, alcohol, and bread. This way, he was able to finish about 2100 pieces of art in just ten years (Naifeh & Smith, 2011).

On the other hand, Leonardo Da Vinci could be a great example of harmonious passion. He would dissect cadavers and draw their bodies' anatomic structure for hours, even though this was not a commissioned work. He still had control over his own creative process. From this perspective, the artwork's passion is healthy for the individual only when it is in harmonious form. There must be ways to learn to control or convert obsessive passion to harmonious passion. Additionally, the steps to follow to nurture harmonious passion could be identified so that it does not become obsessive. These could be significant points to focus on for future studies.

**Personal Factors.** Cheek and Stahl (1986) discussed the personal differences in play according to gender, personality, and expertise in understanding artistic drives. For instance, in his study, shy students and female students performed less creatively in the presence of reward. In contrast, the extroverted males showed increased creativity once the competition was in place. Being shy can affect the artists' decision to join contests or their level of assertiveness. However, when it comes to self-representation in art, I would like to think of shyness in three ways: The first is when the student is introverted. Introversion might be perceived as timidity and a lack of self-esteem. However, most introverts I have met in my life were confident and self-reliant people. Besides, because they love creating their own world and living in it, they make great artists (and authors). The second way to think of shyness is when the artist has low self-esteem. I have encountered this issue among some of my new students: They were not ready to show everyone what they think or feel on canvas yet as they were afraid of being judged. However, I have observed that with training on techniques and appropriate counseling, my students overcame this barrier rather quickly. Finally, my third approach to shyness is when artists suffer from perceptual blocks, which will be explained in detail in the following section.

Skill level also played an important part: Knowing that they will be evaluated in the end, low-skill students performed more creatively in their drawing than their skilled counterparts (Pollak, 1992). This makes sense because the more you know, the more responsible you feel for that knowledge. For instance, I know most charcoal drawing techniques, such as creating a sketch with accurate proportions and how to blend and shade. While drawing, my critical thinking is constantly running: the more knowledge I have, the more questioning I do. The more meaningful the questions are, the greater the chance of making a mistake. The higher the expectations from you, the more pressure you feel. As a result, your experience weighs on you.

The personal variables that Cheek and Stahl described can be turned into an advantage with guidance and counselling. Knowing the fact that the low-skill and high-skill artists will require different motivational strategies is crucial to know for teachers. Although I disagree with the fact that gender plays any role in artistic motivation, the implicit gender bias does, which will be discussed in 'Environment as a Factor' section.

**Creative Blocks.** Certain factors may restrain us in the process of creating art. From this point on, I will call them "creative blocks." Among these, the most common ones are perceptual, emotional, and mental blocks.

***Perceptual Blocks or Perceptual Sets.*** Perceptual sets (Davis, 1999) happen when we are accustomed to a particular way of thinking and behaving which prevents us from seeing new ideas and perspectives; what is unfamiliar is out of our radar. Of course, depending on our upbringing, values, and biases, these sets will vary. This kind of block's negative effect leads us to jump to conclusions, avoid trying new alternatives, and then blame ourselves for not seeing the solution or alternative way sooner.

We were working on a nude model online when one student in my class was clearly having difficulty getting the details right. He could barely look at the model, and he seemed distressed. When we evaluated the works after class, his work was the least impressive one. While I was giving feedback to him, I realized he had a very conservative upbringing in the Middle East, and it made him uncomfortable to draw a nude model no matter how hard he tried to tell himself that this was just art. He was stressed about how his upbringing affected him, although he thought he had a different set of values and thoughts today. I also see this perceptual block among my students in various ways: I am a huge fan of using household products as supplies in a drawing. When I taught my students how to use a cotton swab and baby oil to blend colored pencils, I remember seeing their suspicious stares. Some students refused to work with these products because they thought professional products would make their drawing look better or vice versa; the household products would negatively affect their art. At the end of the session, no one could tell the difference who used which supplies. In this case, my students' denial behavior was an example of a perceptual block that refrained them from trying something more accessible, cheaper, or newer. This fresh look at the process or the materials could result in a creative breakthrough.

Developing artists will need guidance to see new ideas and perspectives as most of the time these thoughts will be out of their radar. As teachers, by asking questions such as “5 Whys” we could help students find out where the resistance or block is originating from. Furthermore, by performing more brainstorming discussions with artists from all levels, the individuals who suffer from perceptual sets could learn about different ways of thinking.

***Emotional Blocks.*** Emotional blocks are among the most challenging creative struggles. We are all human beings with complex emotions and thoughts. Besides everyday worries such as



financial stress or family issues, inexperienced artists also might encounter emotional blocks due to fear of failure, criticism and bullying, and fear of being different. The lesser the amount of experience and technical knowledge the student has, the more they fear failure. Not knowing what kind of criticism they will receive about their style and technique creates a strain on the new artist. On the contrary, for an experienced artist who has already been through that kind of anxiety, it is more of a familiar circumstance. Falling outside the norm is another worrying factor for some; My students who are into dark art feel anxious about being judged for what they create (see Appendix B). Dark art is supposed to evoke hidden or suppressed emotions in people. However, most people are not happy about or ready for this confrontation, and they do not react positively. Therefore, suggesting a set of tools to deal with anxiety could be really helpful for our students. These tools will be listed in the discussion section in detail.

***Mental Blocks.*** Mental blocks include somewhat deeper emotional issues such as chronic traumas, anxiety, and other kinds of mental illness clouding our motivational judgment. We can think of canvas as a mirror; As we paint, we reveal more about ourselves. Many artwork elements such as the color choices, brush strokes, points of view, and angles tell the viewer a story of the artist, including the artist's past.

I have a student, Dilek, who has been struggling with her father's recent passing. Her father was an artist, as well. He taught everything he knew to his daughter, and they used to draw and paint together. Even when he was fighting cancer, he would sit up in his bed and watch his daughter paint proudly. After his death, drawing became seriously painful for her. Her sorrow had a negative impact on her motivation to create and made her less tolerant towards criticism. She sounded so ready to quit each time she came across a minor problem. Kolodny (2000) talks about similar cases in his study. He mentions that the unconscious meanings of the art-making

process or the product might heighten the anxiety, which eventually could lead to resistance. Additionally, when someone revises their creative work, they confront who they are and how well organized they are as people. This type of confrontation with the self might intensify the already present anxiety and other mental triggers.

Although creative blocks play an inhibiting role in artist motivation, a dose of fear and anxiety might positively drive the less proficient artists. As Leonardo da Vinci said, "Just as courage imperils life, fear protects it." With the right amount of fear and anxiety, artists could be more prepared for trying new techniques or color combinations. Alternatively, they develop a defense mechanism for the possible harsh criticism they will receive. Fear might make them less likely to make mistakes and put more effort into their work. Besides, the chemicals that our brain releases cause a temporary euphoria effect. Amygdala, the part that is responsible for fear –along with other emotions- alerts the hypothalamus, which releases adrenaline (Penn Medicine, 2017). With adrenaline pumping through our muscles, our heart starts racing. We breathe faster and get more oxygen in our bodies. This extra oxygen finds its way to our brain and makes our senses sharper. That is why we tend to perceive the mistakes in our art pieces more clearly in this state. In time, adrenaline subsides, but the final chemical "cortisol" is released this time leaving us in an aroused, *ready for action* state. Thus, if we do not fear the fear and accept it as a part of the normal creative process, we can make it work in our favor.

**Environment as a Factor.** The environment has an impact on artist inspiration as it includes all the elements surrounding them: people, physical space, circumstances, conditions, and objects. As human beings, we are in constant interaction with our surroundings. Depending on the interplay of the different aspects of our surroundings, our environment might inspire our imagination or repress it. In terms of artistic motivation, the space where we make art and where

we live play an important role. For example, a physical room and location, the people we interact with, or a city's resources can all affect artistic development.

***Exposure to Art.*** When an aspiring artist is surrounded by art: museums, exhibitions, classes, workshops, and art stores, they will be given the opportunities to improve and feel inspired. Whereas for an artist trying to learn and develop their art in a more or less isolated environment with no access to such an inspiring environment, self-development will be a more challenging journey.

Welber and Zeiser (1997) studied eminent female and male artists. They found out that many of these creators experienced encouraging family, educational and cultural conditions during childhood, and most were stimulated by the availability of both materials and teachers.

Another environmental factor where the artists would feel more driven is when there is deferred judgment and more room for freedom of thought. Giving the art students more opportunities to freely brainstorm, practice divergent and convergent thinking, make mistakes, and learn from those mistakes could provide a creativity-nurturing environment. In an atmosphere where they are constantly criticized by society or friends and family for what they do or what they are willing to do, the creators will feel discouraged to perform. Thinking that whatever they do, they will not be recognized anyway, the artists might lose all their inspiration. Unfortunately, cultural factors that limit freedom, such as religion, traditions, politics, and other fossilized toxic systems, hinder artistic motivation. Of course, some made their way out of these restricting circumstances either by persistence or luck in history. However, I assert that if the conditions were more creativity-nurturing worldwide, we would have so many more incredible artists and artwork right now.

***Economic Factors.*** Financial challenges put a strain on artist motivation and productivity. Supplies are not cheap, and the art schools are getting more expensive each year. In his blog post, artist Noah Bradley (2013) protested against the high cost of tuition in art schools:

“I am saddened and ashamed of art schools and their blatant exploitation of students. Graduates are woefully ill-prepared for the realities of being professional artists and racked with obscene amounts of debt. By their own estimation, the cost of a four-year education at RISD is \$245,816. As a comparison, the cost of a diploma from Harvard Law School is a mere \$236,100.” (Para. 3)

Although skill training and applying the learned techniques regularly play a crucial role in artist improvement, the quality of the art supplies also affects the outcome. A good quality pencil will make the artist's job easier by not breaking easily and producing the darkest lines. Likewise, a high-standard paint will have pigments that yield vibrant colors. Opaqueness and transparency also vary among the paint products.

My students come from different backgrounds: some are wealthy, most are middle class, and a significant number of them are financially challenged. The ones who struggle to buy high-grade supplies sometimes feel that their art will never be able to reach the standards of their classmates. Thus, they feel demotivated to join contests or other projects, thinking that their limited supplies will inhibit their ability as well. In my experience, good supplies do not turn a lousy artist into a better one. At the same time, a sound artist does not produce bad art with cheap supplies. However, cheap materials make an already unsuccessful painting worse, and top-quality paints make an already-good-looking-painting appear even more attractive. Therefore, I try to explain to my students how the lack of quality supplies can be counterbalanced by skill improvement and learning.

Putting a value on an art piece is difficult as it includes the artist's self-expression and meaning and hours and maybe days of work. Nowadays, the internet provides a platform where so many artists can sell their products or offer their services for lower than market prices which creates unfair competition. Thus, some artists feel that they are forced to undervalue their art to get a chance in the market. However, this kind of economic conflict will take a toll on the artist in the long run: They will feel less motivated to do art. What is the point of selling the work if the effort and time that the artist put in are not worth it?

***Discrimination.*** One of the biggest concerns of humanity in our current world is discrimination and the most common forms that it takes in the art world are racism, sexism, and ageism. Unfortunately, the color of our skin, the location of our birthplace, which genital parts we have, and our date of birth on our IDs are still a defining factor of good art for some people or institutions. When individuals with these kinds of discriminating beliefs become gatekeepers in the community, artists struggle to represent themselves fairly as they are not given equal rights and opportunities to succeed.

The gatekeepers in the art community are curators, art dealers, and gallery owners. Although the internet is slowly taking over by providing artists with a chance to represent themselves in new arenas, galleries are still considered the most prestigious way to be recognized in the art world. There is no guarantee that one will become successful as an artist once they get their foot in the art galleries' door. However, suppose the creator is constantly rejected by curators based on their race, gender, or age. In that case, this could make a damaging impact on their motivation and thus, a damaging impact on their career.

***Sexism.*** When we look at the statistics from the past ten years, the numbers tell a story that is not obvious otherwise: Sexism exists in the art world. Here is what some of the analyses say:

- Work by women artists sells for 40% less than work by male artists (Herships & Garcia, 2020).
- At the Baltimore Museum of Art, only 4% of the collection is by women artists (Herships & Garcia, 2020).
- The average New York art gallery represents 76% to 96% male artists (Sherwin, 2011).
- Over 77% of the galleries in Chelsea represent more males than females-- and only around 5% represent males and females in equal numbers (Sherwin, 2011).
- Nevertheless, the average MFA program in the United States has up to 20% more female students than male students (Sherwin, 2011).

In one independent study, paintings in an auction were used as a test. The same art pieces received almost 50% fewer offers when the bidder knew the gender of the artist was female. If they did not know, they would bid as high as the other pieces in the auction (Herships & Garcia, 2020). Because galleries want to sell and make money, they lean towards what is most likely to make money, thereby perpetuating the sexist cycle, which gets harder to break as more time passes. As an artist, one does not get a detailed explanation for their rejection from the curator. Frankly, even though there is an explanation, it is not going to involve their gender. Most of the time, the gatekeepers might not even be aware of their discriminatory manner. The learned behavior becomes a habit over time, making it hardly noticeable until someone points it out: brewing an implicit bias.

Breaking the discriminative perception against women is not easy as even female artists are not fully aware of the problem. After centuries of ignorance and disdain, the positive changes in recent years to raise awareness of gender equality are promising but not enough to empower

women. Changing the learned behavior both in individuals and cultures takes time. For instance, as mentioned in the previous chapter, Cheek and Stahl (1986) noted that female students performed less creatively in the presence of reward. In contrast, the males showed increased creativity once the competition was in place. Although I respect their studies and agree with them to some extent, I would also like to point out something essential. Female artists did not start their marathons from the same start line as male artists. Although we are equal skill-wise, many other reasons still make us fear competition as females. When we study all the eminent artists and their works in school, we realize they were predominantly male due to a euro-centric, western bias in art history literature. Back then, race, gender, education, and social status were the determining factors in discussing who will advance in the art and who will not. Regrettably, this white, male euro-centricity automatically gives us the subconscious message that only artists fitting that description become successful.

Another interesting point is that most Renaissance paintings depict nude women since the painters mainly were men. This commonality makes women think they are at their best when they are the object in the image rather than the painter behind the canvas. Besides, most renaissance paintings include a war scene, which again puts the observer in the middle of a male-centric environment.

Male-centricity in the art world is so easy to notice for us as women, if not consciously, subconsciously. Once, my talented female student said she does not feel accomplished because she does not get many appraisals after posting her artwork on social media. I had a look at her account, and her art was awe-inspiring. Suddenly, this made me think about my own page. First, I checked the average amount of likes I received on my posts. Then, I visited my male students' Instagram accounts. Most of them had shared what they learned in my class, what we drew

together. Although the same community follows us, and naturally, my students' works are not as complex as mine, they got twice as many likes as I did. Another shocking realization for me was I was getting fewer hits even though my follower base was twice as big (See Appendix A). Of course, there might be other factors at play here. However, as I investigated this more and compared the numbers between my female and male students, unfortunately, my theory seemed stronger: males seem to attract more appraisal for the same quality of work. The bias is disappointing and discouraging for any woman who wants an established place in the art world; Knowing that we start the race already a few steps behind and the fact that the obstacles will be even more challenging for us can be demoralizing.

*Racism.* Racism might be one of the biggest reasons why some exceptionally talented artists are not pursuing an art career. In many cultures, the lighter skin tone is strangely associated with status. In India, being of British descent (i.e., whiter) means higher rank. In Asia, having darker skin means belonging to the working class; this is one of the reasons why they carry umbrellas on sunny days. In Turkey, the darker skin means you come from either Kurdish or Arab descent, which causes negative prejudice due to political reasons. In Brazil and Mexico, whiteness is a measurement of wealth. Deborah E. McDowell (1991) says: In the US, "black" referred to anyone with African ancestry, whereas in Europe "distinctions were drawn between blacks, people of mixed blood, and whites, in ascending hierarchical order" (p. 360). The racist attacks towards Asian people in the US after the pandemic also show the magnitude of the problem. Although psychology should not be used in any way to make racism look okay, I still believe understanding primitive urges might help us understand the origins of discrimination. When two powerful primitive urges: the desire to dominate others and the impulse to suppress the unfamiliar, are combined, racism emerges.



We tend to favor what is familiar to us. For example, during an auction, if the buyers are primarily western male, consciously or subconsciously, they will tend to buy paintings of western male artists. An African black female artist starts the competition in the art world knowing that she probably will not have the same privileges that her western white male counterparts will. This sense of injustice creates a feeling in many novices that these unfair circumstances are their “destiny” or “fate.” Thinking or believing that no matter how hard they work, they will never achieve what their counterparts accomplish in their lifetime, people of color may understandably feel demotivated to pursue art as a career. As teachers, we could help our students see this injustice as an opportunity for them to find their voices in art: they can write, or in this scenario, they can paint their own destiny.

Of course, the world's dark history of slavery is reflected in the earlier Western art pieces. Even the Emancipation sculpture, which marks the end of slavery in the US, ironically symbolizes white supremacy (Figure 3).



*Figure 3- The Emancipation sculpture depicting Abraham Lincoln holding a copy of his Emancipation Proclamation freeing a subjugated male African American slave.*

Besides the racist nature of paintings, there are also other concerning facts in the art community. A 2019 study by the nonprofit Public Library of Science revealed that about 85% of artists represented in the US galleries are white (King et al., 2020). This striking statistic shows the lack of equal representation in exhibitions. In 2020 August, a scandal revealed the level of systematic racism in the US art world. The Whitney Museum of American Art in Manhattan, which has a multi-million-dollar endowment, bought works of black artists who put their art pieces on sale to help raise money for anti-racism organizations. The museum had purchased prints, photographs, posters, and digital works created in response to the Black Lives Matter movement and COVID-19 to display in their "Collective Actions" exhibition. The fact that a museum known for making generous offers to white artists taking a discount route when it comes to black artists says a lot about the systematic racism in the art world.

Working as hard as and being as talented as your white counterparts and not getting the same level of recognition must be disheartening. Under these circumstances, it must be hard for some black artists to feel motivated to exhibit their art. Whereas for some, this could be a provocative act, leading to inspiration.

My Kurdish student Şınar asked me to pick a pen name for her one day. Then she told me that her name was Kurdish, and she was afraid that this would prevent her from getting further in her art career in Turkey. She was looking for a new name to sign her artwork. I encouraged her to keep her name as that is her identity and once our identity is stripped from us, we are left with nothing. Being fearful of the external world's biased view of us and expressing who we are as people under a biased gaze is so demotivating in art. It is unrealistic to expect individuals to succeed in an environment that mistreats them.

*Ageism.* Art galleries do not like too old or too young when it comes to artists. However, how old is too old or too young? If the artwork is thought-provoking, inspiring, or simply beautiful, why does the artist's age matter?

Although more years spent in art might indicate more time to practice the techniques and skills, age does not equal skill. I have worked with many middle-aged students who were not as skilled as my 19-year-old student. I also had many students who expected high praise for their mediocre work just because they were teenagers. As opposed to the artist's age, creative art, hard work, and quality of practice –more than quantity- should be the primary focus to decide on what is a sound art what is not. Some of my students, who learn from their mistakes, improve quickly. Also, studying other artists and their work helps the artist's development tremendously. Therefore, their openness to experience and problem-finding skills play a more critical role in their artistic development than how many years they spent painting. When it comes to creativity,

age should not be a criterion at all. As long as they can dream and imagine, creative minds of a three-year-old and a 73-year-old should not differ. However, the structure of the creative thought would be influenced by the moments experienced in life, perceptual filters, learned behaviors, and emotional and mental status. The experience will be different for everyone regardless of their age. Therefore, again, age cannot be a determining factor of creativity. Several studies support this: Shimonaka and Nakazato (2007) discussed that quantitatively measured creative abilities decline with age, whereas qualitative ones remain the same. Park et al. (2016) argued that the gender and age of the 208 student subjects did not show any effect on their creativity. The results of Restrepo et al.'s (2019) research indicated that, contrary to common belief, creativity does not seem to deteriorate with age. Therefore, what is it then that determines the level of artistic skill or creativity? According to research at Exeter University (Naiman, 2014), excellence is determined by opportunities, encouragement, training, motivation, and, most of all, *practice*. Various combinations of these elements would shape one's path to success. However, none of them are directly related to the age of the creator.

According to an article by Widewalls (Anapur, 2017), a gallery advertised their submission form as follows: "The gallery is looking for young emerging artists only. Fresh, innovative, interesting works and new ideas. Artists between ages twenty-four to thirty-four." A statement like this supports the idea that innovative works, exciting and new ideas only come from this age group.

Until 2017, the British prestigious art contemporary art prize "Turner price" did not accept entries from artists who were older than fifty years old. For an ambitious artist who is older than fifty, this must have been absolutely demotivating. Recently, the increasing power of the internet and social media has given artists more freedom to represent themselves on different

platforms. Maybe gallery owners, award designers, or other gatekeepers are now starting to notice that the relationship between age and good art is nonexistent. Meanwhile, a new generation of artists is already beginning to transcend the biased structures of the traditional art world.

**Internet.** We live in the information age and artists can use this to their advantage. Artists who were desperately looking for representation in galleries and museums now have the opportunity to show themselves to the world. A gallery has four walls, but the internet has no borders. I am one of those artists who showcase their art online to gain acknowledgment and attract students to my workshops. Even though the competition on the web is high and getting noticed takes a lot of time and effort, demonstrating and selling your work on the internet is still easier than getting your artwork accepted and sold by a gallery. Therefore, internet platforms begin to undermine the power and reputation of galleries as the gatekeepers of the art world. Besides, the internet's global reach allows the artists to get noticed internationally: if a gallery or buyer in the US does not like your work, another one in Hong Kong might. Such a global, low cost and easy way of representation seem to motivate my students. A good deal of my counseling sessions includes coaching my students to build their website and social media presence. The computer age is growing so fast that we need to stay alert as new opportunities arise for artists.

Another positive impact of the internet is the fact that it provides endless learning opportunities for artists. From free workshops to paid masterclasses, finding specific training is not troublesome or costly anymore. In the comfort of your own home, you can learn to draw from contemporary masters.

### **Discussion: Impact on Artist Impetus**

The reasons why people make art vary greatly. However, in my experience, the innate drive to know, accomplish, experience stimulation, and express oneself can be listed as the most common motivational factors. Moreover, Vallerand (2012) suggests that harmonious passion, intrinsic motivation, and identified regulation type of extrinsic motivation are common among creators. Learning about the source of creative initiation and perseverance may guide the teachers like me to encourage our students with a personalized strategy. Besides the creative inspiration's origin, knowing the potential positive and negative factors affecting artist motivation is also crucial for trainers. A wide range of reasons, from internal factors such as perceptual, emotional, and mental blocks; to external constituents like discrimination, economic factors, and social exposure to art, make an undeniable impact on artist impetus.

Teaching art is not always about technical training. The most significant portion of my teaching time is dedicated to counseling my students, especially the beginner ones. Our advising sessions include verbal feedback on their progress, suggestions for further improvement, a dialogue on their future aspirations, goals, and current worries and struggles. During our past talks, I noticed the negative impact of time constraints on my students' motivation. They needed time management strategies from an experienced artist. In addition, as they slowly improved their skills, they had an increasing amount of stress. As a result, stress management, meditation, and avoiding anxiety-generating elements in our lives became an essential part of our conversations.

## External Triggers and Their Impact on Internal Motives

In this section, each topic discussion will be followed by an actionable takeaway specifically created as guidance for both art students and teachers. The reflections represent the beginnings of future work which focuses on leveraging my learning from assessing motivational factors into more action-based facilitation of artists' personal and professional development.

**Reward and Evaluation.** In the Reward and Evaluation section, the positive role of verbal praises and the harm that negative feedback causes on motivation were discussed. However, I would like to point out the importance and necessity of both in artist development. Criticism is unavoidable in the art world as everyone has a different opinion, experience, and taste when it comes to art pieces. Although most of this criticism will be constructive feedback, some others will be harsh evaluations. As their teacher, I feel the responsibility to prepare my inexperienced students to listen, digest, accept or reject these types of feedback to learn how to filter the helpful information and make use of it towards their improvement. I would not want to see them demoralized and discouraged after each criticism.

Besides counseling, my amateur students ask for my guidance on technical issues quite often as well. Most of their questions are about *problem finding*: They know when something is wrong in their art, but they cannot pinpoint it. Then, if the students do not get any help, they feel demotivated to continue their project. I always support the transparency between the students and the teacher. The pupils should be able to ask questions to their instructor freely without hesitation. The more they ask for guidance and track their own development, the more quickly they learn from their mistakes, which is a great way to improve themselves.

While looking at the example where I regained my self-confidence upon receiving compliments from an artist that I admired, the effect of extrinsic triggers on intrinsic motivation

is pronounced. Here, the external factor (compliment) worked as a catalyst for the internal factors such as self-confidence, risk-taking, and skill development. Maybe this is what Porter & Lawler (1968) talked about when they mentioned: “the additive relationship” between these two types of motivation.

In addition, looking back at the discussion of an individual's main orientations during the creative process (to be effective, autonomous, and related to significant others), our motivational tendency and the degree to which we get impacted by the circumstances surrounding us change accordingly. Meaning, how one perceives the environmental factor affects the nature of the impact on their motivation. For instance, the two of my students I mentioned earlier gave utterly different responses to my similar feedback: One appreciated it, and the other one rejected it. Although they were in my course for the same amount of time and received the same training from the same person (me), their perception of this feedback was completely unlike. Even though my feedback aimed at their improvement, one student saw it as positive and the other one as negative. Therefore, the locus for evaluating an effect as positive or negative seems to lie within the individual's reaction or response.

As a solution, through combining the ‘Ladder of Inference’ (Chris Argyris, 1970) and listening with empathy skills, we as teachers could suggest our students become more aware of their own thinking and reasoning about the issues raised. Then, we can make our rationale more visible to them via advocacy and inquiry into their thinking and analysis. Ladder of inference (Figure 4) can be described as a chain of thoughts that starts from selecting data. It is then quickly translated into the individual's own terms, which let them re-explain the story to themselves, and as a final step, the conclusions are drawn. What makes this process dangerous is that it all happens incredibly quickly, leaving the person unaware that they are only selecting



some of the data. Most of the time, the beliefs and assumptions underlying the initial data selection and the inferences that people draw are hidden to them. Nonetheless, learning about the ladder of inference can help art students with criticism, societal pressure, and overcome the perceptual blocks.

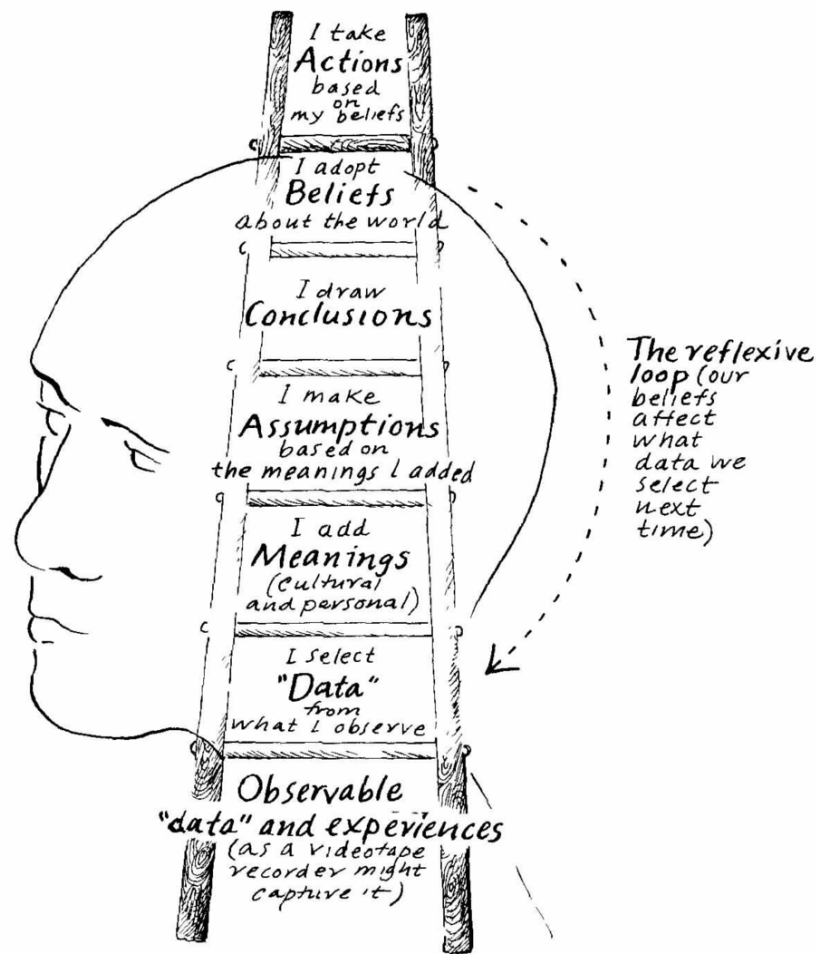


Figure 4-The Ladder of Inference: A thinking process that we go through, from data to action, most of the time without realizing it (Senge, 1994, p. 245, Figure 3).

Here, I would like to mention the cognitive immunization studies and how applying their techniques might be helpful to incorporate into student counseling sessions (Hennessey, Amabile, & Martinage, 1989; Hennessey & Zbikowski, 1993). The immunization term is used to define the training focused on strengthening intrinsic motivation and providing techniques to

fight against extrinsic reward mechanisms' harmful effects (Hennessey, 2000). I found the Hennessey, Amabile, & Martinage (1989) study particularly interesting as they experimented on professional artists. The immunization training in question alters the perception of the reward from a source of external control into an added bonus. Although the instruction's exact nature is not explicit, I claim that such insight could be helpful in artistic motivation. For instance, for the students with efficiency orientation rather than the autonomous tendency, an immunization process including practices on self-efficacy, self-esteem, and experience with rewards could help increase their intrinsic motivation. An individual with an efficiency orientation will be impacted by extrinsic factors more easily than the autonomous one. Therefore, their dependency on reward and recognition might be decreased by a strengthened belief in their work and abilities. In time, with the help of immunization techniques, the artist might initiate their creative process purely out of innate joy without worrying about the external factors.

**Actionable Takeaway.** As an artist, try to identify what motivates you the most and find ways to practice that. If joining a contest will inspire you, ask your instructor or friends about how to enter one. If you are a teacher, do not hesitate to give verbal praises: there is always something to acknowledge in students' artwork. If you are a student, besides all the self-criticism you are making, perform some verbal praising. Give a pat on your back and say, "Good job!".

**Passion.** Vallerand's (2012) harmonious and obsessive passion can be thought as 'flow' of Csikszentmihalyi (1975): "A state in which people are so involved in an activity that nothing else seems to matter; the experience is so enjoyable that people will continue to do it even at great cost, for the sheer sake of doing it." (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990, p.4). This can be also described as "intrinsic motivation to experience stimulation". The more we can go with the

“flow”, the more productive, creative, and inspired we will feel. However, artists need to be aware of the long-term harmful ramifications of obsessive passion.

**Actionable Takeaway.** If your artwork is taking control of you instead of you being in control of your creative process, be aware of the long-term harmful effects. Make sure to spend time on self-care: read, meditate, exercise, spend time with your loved ones and eat healthily. Your canvas will be waiting for you no matter what, but any moment that you avoid spending with your family and friends will not come back.

**Personal Factors.** Csikszentmihalyi says: “Personality differences probably result in differential responsiveness to flow activities” (1990, p. 61). Meaning, the artist's engagement with the creative process might be interrupted due to some of their characteristic traits. For instance, perfectionism is common among my students, and it sometimes prevents them from getting into the flow state. Another demotivating factor is the inability to delay gratitude. Drawing or painting takes time. Many times, I heard my students complaining that they did not see results quick enough. Usually, these students are the ones who cannot finish an art piece in one sitting, and they mistakenly see this as a weakness. Everyone has their own style and their own pace.

These differences also affect the perception of an external factor as negative or positive (see perceptual blocks section in this chapter) depending on the person.

**Actionable Takeaway.** Practice art every day. The more skills you learn, the more motivated you will feel to do even better. If you are struggling with the pressure of high expectations from you, remember Dali's words: "Have no fear of perfection - you'll never reach it." Worry about getting your thoughts and message on canvas, not about the mistakes you are about to make. Every error in art is reversible, if not erasable.

## Creative Blocks

**1. *Perceptual Blocks.*** Defying perceptual and emotional blocks can be challenging as the source of the hurdle might differ from person to person. However, perceptual blocks can be overcome by creative awareness activities such as six thinking hats (De Bono, 1999), lateral thinking (De Bono, 1967), and the SCAMPER method (Osborn, 1953): Substitute, combine, adapt, modify (Also magnify and minify), put to another use, eliminate, and reverse. Like brain gymnastics, these methods can relax the creative muscles and open up the mind to more possibilities. The biggest obstacle that a person with perceptual block faces is the inability to think flexibly. In six thinking hats, the individual gets the chance to look at the problem at hand from different perspectives. As an example, think about my student who did not want to try the blending method with the household products: wearing the white hat, he could lay out the facts, explore what those materials are made of and see if someone used them before for the same purpose. Then, he could try the yellow hat on to see the potential outcome of using these products. Optimistically, what could be the benefits? Finally, he could put the black hat on and ask, “What could be the negative outcomes? What makes me afraid of using inexpensive household products in my art?” This “six thinking hats” activity would let the student question their perception of the problem and approach it from many different angles.

SCAMPER is another method to enhance flexibility in thinking. Thinking about a substitute for an object or re-shaping it by magnifying or modifying would introduce different solution pathways to a single problem. For example, what could be a substitute for watercolor paint? Answers could be anywhere from food coloring, coffee, toothpaste to hair dye. Brainstorming such ideas forces the person to think more flexibly each time by enabling them to think out of their comfort zone.

**Actionable Takeaway.** Understanding how people perceive the world, the inferences they make, and why they think what they think might be a challenging thing to discover. While filtering the information received, individuals make connections to their past experiences. They also assess their current state of mind and emotions. Therefore, depending on their past, personality tendencies, and feelings of that moment, each person will judge the external cue and internalize it differently. In Figure 5, there is an example of how two artists perceive the same situation in completely opposite ways. At first, all the external factors listed seem to be negative ones. However, with a closer look, we understand that the situations listed do not give any harm to the (+) artist. On the contrary, the (+) artist saw an opportunity in each case.

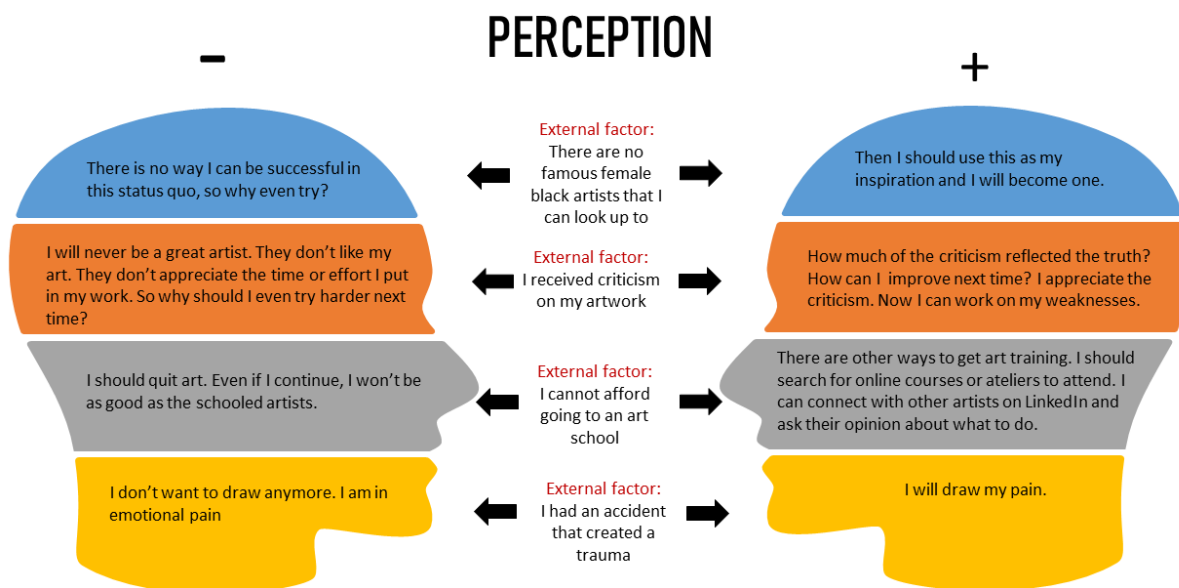


Figure 5- Positive and Negative Perception of the same external factor input.

**2. Emotional Blocks.** As far as the emotional blocks are concerned, the fear of failure seems to be the biggest problem among the inexperienced artists that I encounter in my practice. If we do not “fear the fear” and instead accept it as a part of the normal creative process, we can

make it work in our favor. For instance, I film step-by-step portrait drawing tutorials for my students. No matter how many times I do this, I am afraid to make a big mistake and ruin the hours of work each time I draw. However, this fear gives me extra attention: The alertness of the adrenalin that fear gives help me create my art with more focus. Besides, to lessen my anxiety, I start my drawing with a carefully prepared initial sketch, I lay out all the supplies I will need on my desk in advance, and I rehearse my picture in my head so that I do not miss a step. Thus, my tutorials turn out to be informative and professional. I advise the same tactics to my students to lessen their anxiety.

Reframing what failure is could be the first step in preventing fear. What one perceives as failure might be the definition of success for another student. For example, making it to the quarter-finals in an art competition is an excellent success for a student of mine. Nonetheless, for my other student, if they are not the winner of the competition, that means they failed. There is no right or wrong definition of failure; however, if the meaning the person attributes to this concept is causing more harm than good to this individual, then re-conceptualizing might be a helpful method to enhance or maintain their creative motivation. When the pandemic hit, I could not give in-person workshops anymore. I also had lost my full-time job in my school. Instead of seeing this as a negative thing, I reframed this situation as an opportunity for self-improvement. Finally, I got the time to record my online art course, finish writing my book, and read more about art and practice. In just a matter of months, I had realized my dream by establishing my online art business. Being laid off or being in lockdown might mean terrible things for the most. Nonetheless, I saw it as an opportunity and did everything in my power to make the best out of it.

**Actionable Takeaway.** Embrace being different. Create a support group or join existing art groups on social media who think and visualize things as you do. When the fear starts to take over, do not forget that no one has to see your art until you decide to display it. There will not be anyone else during your creative process, just you and your supplies. Once you choose to showcase your work, be aware of two types of criticism: 1. Constructive criticism, where the person aims for your improvement and suggests valuable tips for you to benefit from. 2. Bullying, where the person aims to hurt you by making mean and negative comments just for their satisfaction. It is essential to differentiate these two. Artists should not let the bullies get under their skin. These types of comments should be ignored and forgotten right away. If there is an insult or if the bullying took a repetitive form, legal action should be taken. As teachers, we should provide our support to our students who are the victims of bullying by discussing healthiest ways to fight this kind of behavior.

**3. Mental Blocks.** As for mental blocks, professional help is needed since the support that teachers offer can be limited in this case. It is possible to use traumas or mental illnesses in artists' favor, just like Van Gogh, Frida Kahlo, Salvador Dali, or Yayoi Kusama. For example, Frida Kahlo started painting after a tragic accident that left her with chronic pain for the rest of her life. She was cheated on, too. All this pain was reflected on her canvas which allowed her to deal with them and become more powerful. Yayoi Kusama's childhood was difficult. Her mother would tear apart her drawings. In return, Kusama would draw more. When her parents refused to buy supplies for her, she used whatever she found at home to draw with. Moreover, Kusama struggled with mental illness all her life. Instead of giving a break to her creative process, she turned her hallucinations -dots - into her trademark art (Cole, 2021) (Figure 6). Sometimes the power we need to initiate something important hides in the most painful moments. If an artist can

discover that power and turn it to their advantage, then they will take a huge step towards finding their voice with their art.



*Figure 6 - Yayoi Kusama turned her hallucinations into her art. Now, these dots are her trademark.*

**Actionable Takeaway.** If you do not know the reason behind your creative block, do not hesitate to seek psychological help. A professional can make connections between your past and present and provide you with tools to overcome your block.

To minimize anxiety during your art-making process, make sure to have all your supplies ready within your reach. Also, a well-prepared initial sketch would be helpful. If you are painting, test out your paint mixes at the beginning on a draft paper. Once all these stress factors are gone, you can enjoy pouring your imagination onto your paper.



**Exposure to Art.** Da Vinci worked at the famous artist del Verrocchio's workshop for ten years. Van Gogh kept working at art galleries, trying to take lessons in different art schools. When I asked myself: How about me? I did not work with an artist or go to an art school. However, I was raised in a big city where I enjoyed going to exhibitions and museums. Besides, street art was everywhere. Thus, I was surrounded by art.

In our century, people who have internet do not have the excuse to say, “I don’t have access to art or artists.” There are plenty of opportunities online to learn, explore, and connect.

Exposure to art matters for artists for many reasons. They:

- Learn about different styles, mediums, and artists, which help them shape their own art identity.
- Learn about art history, which explains many trends in art pieces, such as how Western white male dominance is observed in renaissance art and how street art began in the 1970s by people who were rebelling against society’s rules.
- Connect with other artists who exchange opinions about art-making: supplies, techniques, subjects, and more.
- Connect with expert artists who can teach the knowledge and experience they have.
- Notice the existence of art and realize how art makes our world a better place by provoking thoughts, bringing colors, and uniting people from different backgrounds toward one goal: creation.

**Actionable Takeaway.** Find artists on social media and kindly ask them to comment on your artwork. The worst thing that can happen would be no answer, which is not terrible. Visit

museums, read art books about techniques and history, watch tutorials online, attend ateliers and social networking events in your city as much as you can.

**Economic Factors.** Art education is expensive, supplies are hard to afford, and commissions do not pay the bills. Therefore, many artists do the work they love as a second job while working full-time somewhere else. However, these are still not good enough reasons to feel bad about ourselves or our artistic career. There is an anonymous quote: “My happiness grows in direct proportion to my acceptance, and inverse proportions to my expectations.” Instead of feeling beaten by the system and curse the fact that we cannot live up to our expectations, maybe we should learn to stay in our reality for a moment and look for opportunities there. People think that more money or more success will bring them happiness, yet they forget that we adapt to our circumstances that become our new normal as human beings. According to Rutledge et al. (2014), expectations influence the happiness level long before the reward. In one of their experiments, the results showed that the ultimate reward money the participants won at the end of a game did not seem to have an impact on their happiness. Instead, their happiness level changed moment to moment according to gamers’ expectations and momentary rewards during the experiment process. Most aspiring artists think that selling their art for a high price or winning a contest in the first place will give them the motivation or happiness that they are seeking for. However, as artists, the moments of creating that art piece with the expectations of making our best possible are the ones that move us and joy us the most. If one solely focuses on the money or reward and then that the outcome was not like they planned, the discouragement can be detrimental to their intrinsic motivation. What the artist is missing in this scenario are the moments of joy of experimenting, mastering skills, and experiencing “the flow.” Commission or

the award should not be the “goal” of the artist but a “tool” to get that highly motivated and happy state.

**Actionable Takeaway.** Explore different ways to earn money from art, such as: selling your paintings online, teaching how to draw, writing blogs or e-books, making book illustrations, training to be an arts event coordinator, etc. Learn the basics of social media promotion and have a website to showcase your work. By giving ads on your website, you can also make passive income.

Know your value and stand behind it. If you do not believe your art is worth, for example, \$500, no one will. Conduct market research and look at the price tags on works of artists who have similar experience and skill levels. After getting an estimate, choose your price in that range, considering the time and effort you put into that art piece. Never undervalue your work.

If you are an artist on a budget, try to be creative with the supplies you can afford. Who knows, maybe you will start a new style or movement? Just like Andrew Turtsevyeh did with his portraits: He only used coffee to paint (Figure 7).



*Figure 7- Coffee Art Portrait by Andrew Turtsevyich.*

**Discrimination.** In an earlier section of this paper addressing racism, I discussed how a historically repetitive act of injustice might create a feeling in many novice artists that such unfair circumstances are their “destiny” or “fate.” As teachers, we must help prepare students for potential discrimination due to their race, gender, or age. Even for the aspiring artists who do not accept this as their fate, the road to success is full of obstacles. Therefore, in order to help students fight such beliefs, teachers could provide tools to overcome possible future hurdles.

When faced with discrimination, not knowing where to go, which doors to knock might make the artist helpless or even, in some cases, inadequate. I cannot think of any more significant demotivating factor than an emotional toll felt by a victim of discrimination.

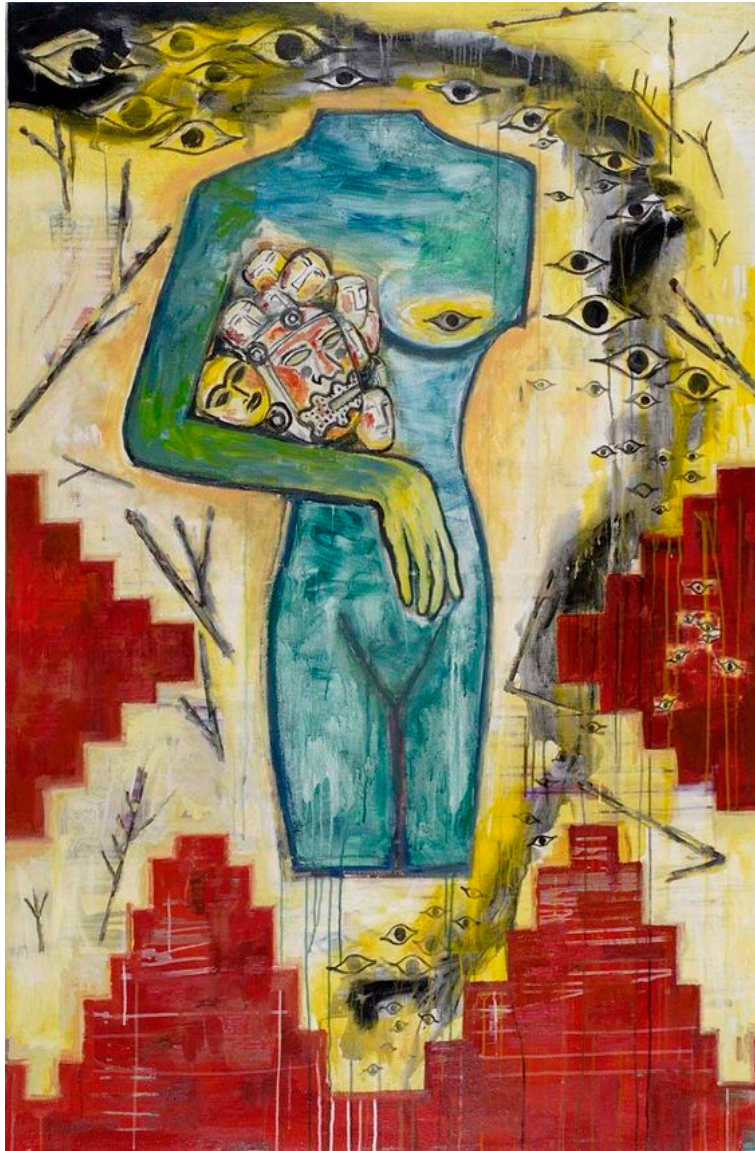
As the aspiring artists improve their online presence and cultivate a well-established online platform to exhibit, discuss or sell their creations, they will get a chance to express themselves without suppression. However, due high level of competition, artists should spend extra effort on improving their visibility. As they reach more people online and make contact

with the gatekeepers, the young artists will feel more inspired to work. Although the internet gives an equal chance of representation, the website visitors' behavior can still be discriminating, just like in the example I gave in the sexism section (See Appendix A).

***Actionable Takeaways.*** This section has been divided into three parts as different strategies should be followed for each discriminatory behavior: sexism, racism, and ageism.

***Sexism.*** Pay attention to sexist language, politely confront people who use it and try to avoid it yourself. Practice metacognition regularly while making your choices. For example, when you choose your doctor, do you have a gender bias? How about when selecting a private tutor or babysitter for your child? I know these might not look related to art directly, but just like Martin Luther King, Jr. said: "Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly affects all indirectly."

If you are discriminated against, speak up. Demand your rights. The quieter you become, the more justified the racists and sexists feel. Make this issue the center of your art, give a powerful message like Jaune Quick-to-See Smith does with her work (Figure 8).



*Figure 8- The French-Cree, Shoshone, Salish, New Mexican artist Jaune Quick-to-See Smith makes art that repositions Native American culture within contemporary American life.*

*Racism.* Buy, share, or post about the art of someone non-white or from a marginalized community. Discuss questions like "What is my comfort level talking about race/racism? Does this comfort level change if I am talking about my own race vs. other peoples' race? How racism affects other people vs. how it affects me?" with your friends and family.



Take this unfairness and use it as fuel for your creativity. Use your voice through your art, get inspired, and spread the message in your unique way, just like Marshall Kerry James did (Figure 9).



Figure 9- *Past Time* by Marshall Kerry James.

*Ageism.* Verbally support and encourage young artists. The amount of practice is more important than the artist's age. Try to collaborate with different age groups. Promote both older and younger artists' work on your social media.

Practice every day. It does not matter how long your session takes; it may be for 15 minutes or hours. Consistency is the key. Each day you get in front of that canvas, you will get closer to realizing yourself as an artist.

**Internet.** Online platforms provide new venues for artists to display their work and get recognized. Especially due to the 2020 pandemic, more virtual galleries and exhibitions found their place online. While the internet gives this opportunity, it does not guarantee sales or even visibility. Artists need to learn strategies to survive the competition on the web. Thus, besides artistic skills, today, they must learn the tactics of the cyber world. Algorithms, SEO, keywords, tags, hashtags, and backlinks are among the terms that the new generation of artists should get acquainted with. The best place to start is to create a professional website with the best work of the artist and the contact information. Making a list of virtual platforms for artists and researching how to pitch them would be a great next step. As an art teacher, I will make sure to include these topics in my curriculum.

**Actionable Takeaway.** Sign up for free or low-cost classes online to improve your art. Many artists on platforms such as Patreon and Skillshare offer their knowledge and techniques for very reasonable prices.

Create a website and display your art. Write a blog on your website about your art. Film short video clips of your work and post them online, both on your page and on YouTube, Vimeo, etc. Keep your social media followers engaged by answering their questions, replying to their comments, and asking their opinions on art subjects. Post consistently to establish trust and reliability.

## Conclusion

Artists, gatekeepers, and teachers must be informed about the existence and impact of motivational factors and their potential ramifications. For artists, especially the inexperienced ones, to build long-lasting, healthy habits such as improving self-esteem, feeling the motivation



to initiate, originate, and continue their art process with maximum creativity and productivity, the elements that directly impact artists need to be understood and studied in detail. However, more than the factors themselves, how people perceive them and how they choose to react to them play the most crucial role (Figure 5). Building a tool kit for artists to be used for certain external circumstances might help them stay motivated. Therefore, I created a funnel (Figure 10) showing the path of motivation for an artist, starting from the bottom “urge to create”, going all the way top to “recognition.” The red line marks where the professional career of the artist begins. On the right, there is a fast tool kit for each step, specifically written for both art students and teachers.

The creation of art starts with the bottom step where intrinsic motivation, harmonious passion, or integrated regulation happen. The following four elements of direct impact do not have to follow the exact order, but their existence is essential. Once the novice artist finds themselves in the gatekeepers' hands, the other factors: equality, reward, evaluation, and recognition seem to be in the equation even more. For each of the challenging circumstances, the tools listed in this paper and Figure 10 can help artists ask the right questions and see things from a different perspective.

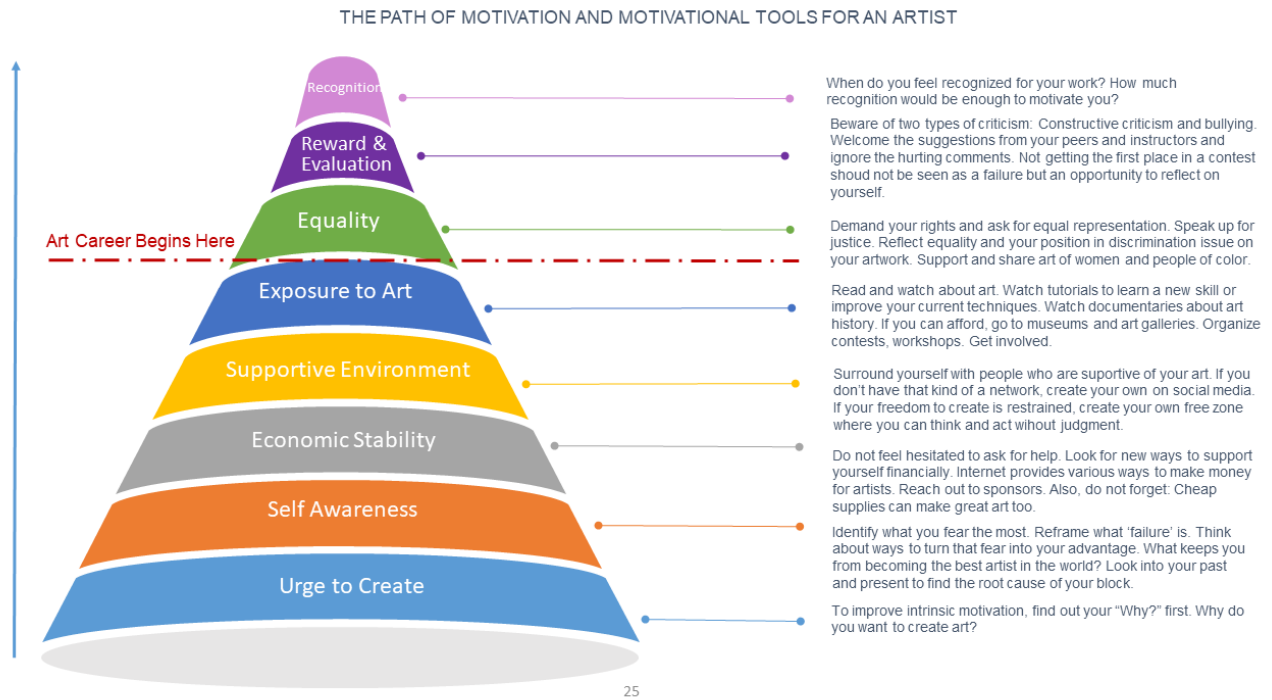
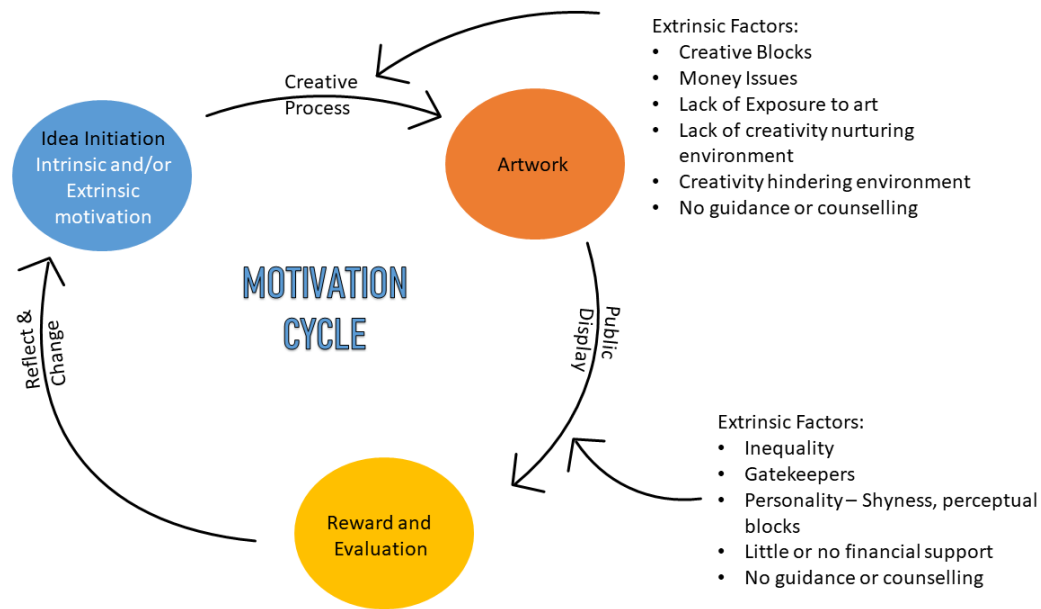


Figure 10- The Path of motivation and Motivational Tools for the Artists.

Another way of approaching motivational factors is illustrated in Figure 11. In this motivation cycle that I created, I wanted to show during which processes the external factors usually happen to make an impact. Knowing what to expect when could be a helpful tool for both art teachers and students so that they can be prepared in advance.



*Figure 11- The Motivation Cycle for the artist showing the main stages and potential external factors affecting each step.*

In the motivation cycle, the idea initiation is the first step, followed by the creative process. After the artwork is created, it is ready to be displayed or sold, leading to the reward and evaluation phase. By acknowledging the points of constructive criticism and analyzing the overall comments and reaction, the artist reflects on their work to make the necessary changes in their process. For instance, if the critiques were about the lack of a specific technique, the artist might decide to develop themselves further on that subject. This step is essential as it allows the artist to improve themselves and reflect upon their creativity. However, the “reflect & change” phase is heavily influenced by the extrinsic factors that might have intervened in the previous stages (Figure 11). For example, suppose the artist was suffering from a perceptual block and had no guidance or counseling on that matter, during the last step of the cycle. In that case, they will not know what the problem has been all along and will continue to create without resolving that issue. As the criticism points to the same problems repeatedly in the successive cycles, the artist will lose their motivation to make art again.

Another vital thing to remember is the perception of these external elements by the artist. Some of these circumstances become obstacles because the artist decides them to be so (Figure 5). When an artist gets treated unfairly in a competition, and they lose because of that, there are two possible choices in front of them: 1. Blame their loss on the system, feel defeated and lose their motive, 2. Make a formal complaint about the situation, go back to the art studio, and create even a better piece (maybe even depicting inequality). Thus, the understanding and internalization of these environmental elements matter more than what they actually are. They are what people make of them.

In this paper, some of the actionable takeaways and tools (Figure 10) are introduced. Artists, especially novices, can benefit from these ideas presented to keep themselves inspired in (relatively) challenging circumstances. Teachers can use these suggestions to help their students on their creative journey.

### **Connection to the Critical and Creative Thinking Graduate Program (CCT)**

Teaching essential Critical Thinking tools to future gatekeepers might put an end to discrimination in art. Through performing believing and doubting game (Elbow 2008), sixteen habits of mind (Costa 2000), mindful dialogue and nonviolent communication (Rosenberg, 2005) that we learned in Creative Thinking, Collaboration and Organizational Change courses, we can prepare our students and teachers for difficult but much needed conversations to defend equality.

In my counseling sessions, I try to exercise Socratic questioning that we mastered in Foundations of Philosophical Thought class and 'thinking about thinking' that we learned in Metacognition course. These courses provided me the basic tools to help my students with the matters related to perception, and openness to experience.

Most of the time, my students come to these office hours with the complaint that there is something wrong with their painting, but they cannot identify precisely what the issue is. As I learned in the Creative Thinking class, the “Creative Problem Solving (CPS)” model has stages, and the very first step, “Clarify” seems to be where my students struggle the most. “Problem Finding” is more difficult for them than “Solution Finding.” Hence, I pick our exercises in guidance sessions related to the CPS model, including 5 Whys, monitoring learning, and error correction from our Metacognition and Creative Thinking classes.

In “Seminar in Creativity: Overcoming Creative Blocks”, I had studied different types of struggles of the imaginative mind. This paper discusses these challenges in detail. In order to help students understand the root cause of their emotional block, 5 Whys method can be implemented. For example, if a student says:

STUDENT: “I don’t feel like painting today.”

ME: “Why are you feeling like that?” (1<sup>st</sup> Why)

STUDENT: “I don’t know. I just don’t want to spend hours on a portrait right now.”

ME: “Why don’t you want to spend hours on your drawing?” (2<sup>nd</sup> Why)

STUDENT: “Because I’m tired.”

ME: “Why are you tired? Did you not sleep last night?” (3<sup>rd</sup> Why)

STUDENT: “Yes, I did. I’m tired of thinking.”

ME: “Why are you tired of thinking?” (4<sup>th</sup> Why)

STUDENT: “Because my family wants me to move in with them, and I don’t. I have been thinking about this for the whole week. It is exhausting.”

In this example, we did not even have to ask the “5<sup>th</sup> Why” as we learned the root of the cause on the fourth question.

Another creative barrier that we learned in the course was the perceptual blocks. For the aspiring artists who are suffering from not thinking flexibly, SCAMPER method and the six thinking hats activity that we practiced in the Creative Thinking course could be beneficial. As the student magnifies, minifies, modifies things, and analyzes the situation from different perspectives, they will become more open to experience.

Ladder of Inference (Argyris, 1970) that I read about in the Creative Thinking, Collaboration, and Organizational Change class, was a valuable concept for understanding how perception works. By combining the Critical Thinking tools such as reframing and listening with empathy, I was able to think about how to turn unfavorable circumstances into positive situations for the artists.

Finally, I was inspired by the “epicycles” that I used in the “Action Research for Educational, Professional, and Personal Change” class for the drawing of the motivational cycle visual.

### **Moving Forward**

I contend that more work needs to be done on racism, sexism, and ageism issues. Raising awareness and drawing attention to such topics will give the new generations of artists the hope and inspiration they are looking for. In a world that equity (and equality) exists, art will do nothing but thrive.

As far as the extrinsic constraints are concerned, artists need more financial support from the government. According to Artworkarchives article (2016) (See Appendix C), the US

Department of Education announced in 2015 that after financial aid is taken out of the equation, 9 out of 10 of the most expensive colleges are art schools. Considering how much a lawyer can make after graduation to pay their tuition off is not comparable to an artist's compensation. As teachers, we would like to know more about the available resources for art students so that we could at least help with their financial burden.

Another critical point to consider for future studies is how incentives work on intrinsic motivation. Conflicting research results indicate that the effect of reward and evaluation on artists is needed to be explored further. Under the reward topic, the immunization studies are promising. However, we should find ways to implement strategies to eliminate the negative effects of incentives and other extrinsic components such as environmental factors. I am aiming to present the results of this research in a podcast format so that I can inspire inexperienced artists in a more fun and convenient way.

Finally, the significant role of perception in artist motivation has become apparent in this research. It is vital to learn how to adapt a positive perception filtering model (Figure 5) so that artists could see some of the external factors, not as obstacles but as their advantages. More studies need to be done on that front.

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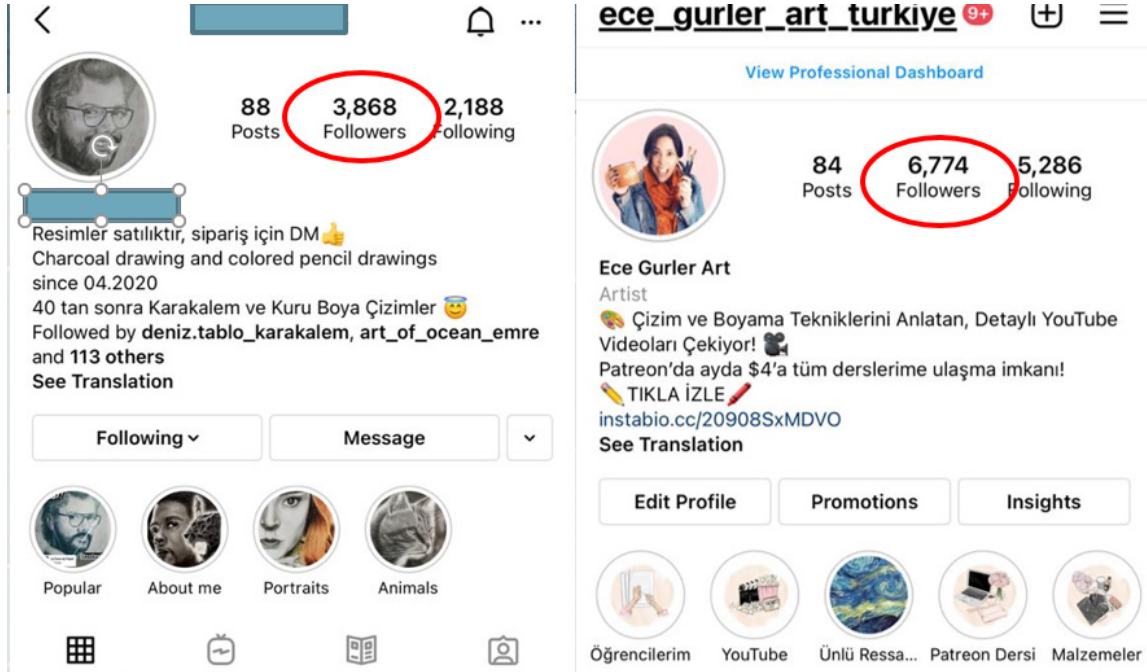
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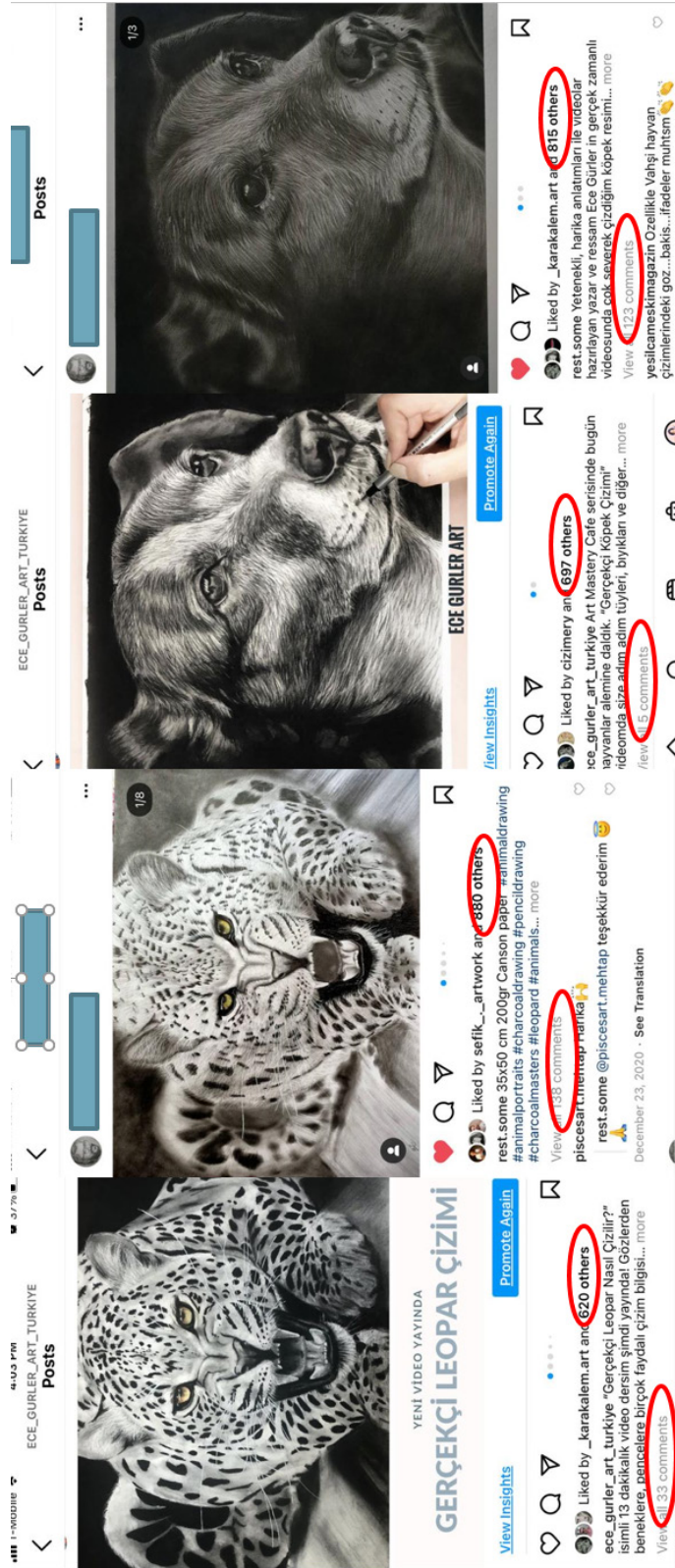
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## Appendices

### APPENDIX A: SOCIAL MEDIA RECOGNITION COMPARISON

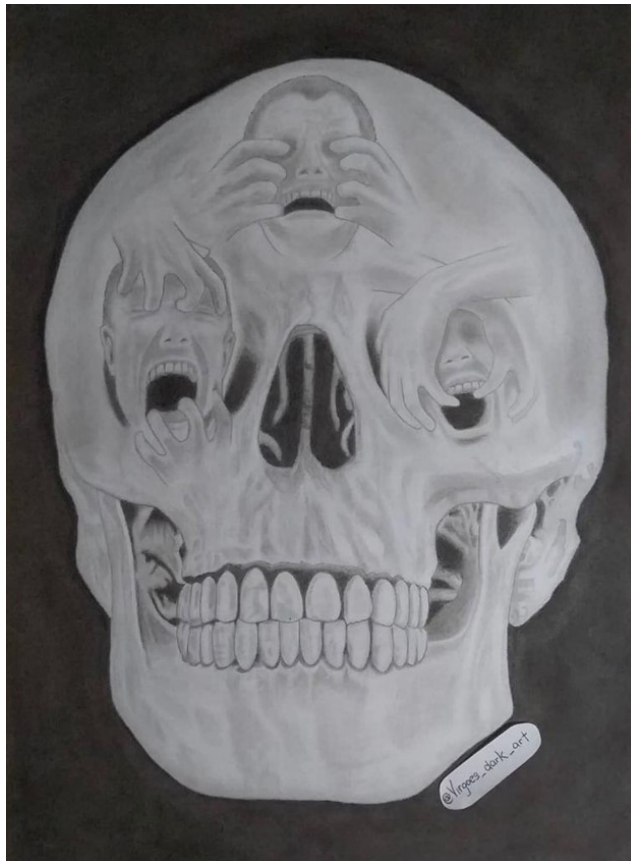
Screenshots of Instagram accounts of me and my male student showing the number of followers and a comparison of number of comments and likes for the same drawings we did.







APPENDIX B: DARK ART EXAMPLES FROM MY STUDENTS



APPENDIX C: ART SCHOOL FACTS

